

New records of Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* in Nigeria

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Nouvelles observations du Bruant ortolan *Emberiza hortulana* au Nigéria. L'auteur rapporte l'observation d'au moins quatre Bruants ortolans *Emberiza hortulana* dans la Forêt classée d'Amurum, sur le Plateau de Jos, au centre du Nigéria, en novembre–décembre 2002. Les mentions précédentes datent de 1963–1966, quand au moins douze individus furent observés, à Vom, également sur le Plateau de Jos, et à Zaria, environ 240 km au nord-ouest.

On 12 November 2002, during the course of regular bird surveys, a single male Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* was observed at Amurum Forest Reserve, on the Jos Plateau, in central Nigeria (09°52'N 08°58'E). Over the following month, at least one male, one female and two immatures were seen. One individual trapped and ringed on 1 December 2002 was considered to be an immature male, using criteria outlined in Svensson⁵.

These observations are the first of this species in Nigeria since the three northern winters of 1963/64, 1964/65 and 1965/66, when at least 12 individuals were recorded, between late December and mid-April, at Vom, also on the Jos Plateau, and at Zaria, c240 km north-west of the Jos Plateau^{4–8}. There are no other records from the country.

As with the previous records, the November–December 2002 individuals were mostly observed on or near rocky outcrops. They appeared to feed at the edges of small grassy patches amongst bare rock, but were occasionally seen in the nearby Guinea savanna scrub and drinking from adjacent streams.

The European population of Ortolan Bunting has suffered a massive decline and is consequently listed on Annex I of the European Birds Directive⁶. It occurs from Western Europe across Eurasia to Lake Baikal² and migrates south to winter in Africa and southern Asia. It is regular, albeit uncommon, in Mauritania south to Liberia and in north-east Chad¹.

The species appears to be genuinely rare in Nigeria and the records reported above were probably only made due to long periods of intensive



Figure 1. Male Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, Amurum Forest Reserve, Nigeria, 14 November 2003 (Ross McGregor)

Bruant ortolan *Emberiza hortulana*, mâle, Forêt classée d'Amurum, Nigéria, 14 novembre 2003 (Ross McGregor)

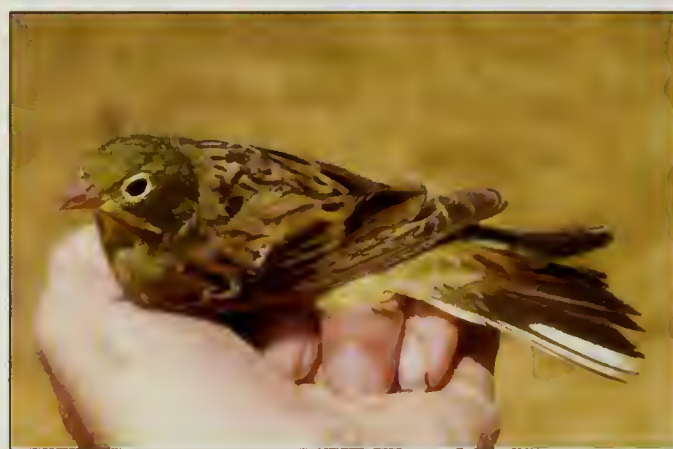


Figure 2. Immature male Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana*, Amurum Forest Reserve, Nigeria, 1 December 2003 (Ross McGregor)

Bruant ortolan *Emberiza hortulana*, mâle immature, Forêt classée d'Amurum, Nigéria, 1 décembre 2003 (Ross McGregor)

field work in the area. Numbers in Nigeria may be very small and the species consequently difficult to detect. Now that members of the A.P. Leventis Ornithological Research Institute are conducting regular surveys of the Jos Plateau it may be possible to determine if the area is a regular wintering site or, as Elgood³ suggested, that the area is really 'south of the normal wintering range' and that these birds were merely vagrants.

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